

Lilian's Lovebird *Agapornis lilianae* in Tanzania

On 14 April 1980, I observed two lovebirds *Agapornis* spp. in Mtwara township (10° 16S, 40° 11E) coastal southeastern Tanzania. From a second floor balcony, the birds were observed flying across and circling around adjacent gardens. They resembled Fischer's Lovebird *Agapornis fischeri* but lacked the distinctive blue upper tail coverts of that species. Being new to East Africa at the time, and lacking reference books, I was unable to place them.

From field notes taken at the time of the observation, *A. lilianae* was the only possibility but available literature suggested that this species was found no closer than central Malawi. That these birds were escapes brought in from Malawi was considered unlikely; no trade exists between these areas and Mtwara is not used as an exit point for the bird trade. Despite several visits to Mtwara and the immediate hinterland during the following years, no other lovebirds were observed and I concluded that the observation was a single one of escaped birds.

On 25 September 1989, Brother Arthur Grawehr was visiting a parish priest at Ligunga (11° 18S, 36° 25E) southeast of Songea and some 45 km north of the Moçambique border. On a tree close to a large fish pool and adjacent to a harvested maize field was a flock of about 15 *A. lilianae*. The orange-red faces and clear green rump/upper tail were clearly visible. The parish priest's driver stated that the birds were numerous and well known in the area. On the morning of 15 February 1990, two Lilian's Lovebirds were observed in the Matumbi Hills north west of Kilwa (Davies 1991).

Southern Tanzania is virtually unknown ornithologically but I felt that the occurrence of this distinctive species could not have gone unnoticed and I conducted a literature search.

Although Forshaw & Cooper (1987) include the area in their distribution map, they do not give references. The handbook of Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1953) does not record the species but field data collection for this publication ended some time in the mid 1940s. However, their handbook for the southern third of Africa (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1962) mentions Tanganyika Territory under "general distribution." The reference for this (although not quoted) must surely be that of Moreau (1945), "The dwarf parrots (*Agapornis*) of Tanganyika", page 26 states: "Lately, however, there have been independent reports of what are believed to be *Agapornis lilianae* in the west of Rufiji District and in Liwale. These records which are being pursued, are of extraordinary interest because *lilianae* has not previously been reported nearer than the Shire and Zambezi Valleys."

Moreau's correspondents for this comment were C. J. P. Ionides, who reported them nesting near Liwale in March, R. de la B. Barker and L. A. Haldane, all reliable observers.

There can be no doubt that viable populations of this species have existed in Tanzania for some time. The main habitat type in southern Tanzania is miombo woodland which is avoided by *lilianae* in Zambia (Benson, *et al.* 1971) and by *A. fischeri* and *A. personata* in Tanzania (pers. obs.). However, the vegetation maps for Tanzania show large areas of *Acacia* woodland south of Songea and Masasi and pockets of *Acacia*-dominated grassland near Liwale, the Matumbi Hills and just inland from Mtwara.

This species should now be admitted to the avifauna of East Africa.

Acknowledgements

To Dylan Aspinwall and Dale Hanmer for useful comments on an earlier draft of this note and especially to Brother Arthur Grawehr for realizing the significance of his sightings.

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Scopus 15: 51–52, August 1991 Received 2 February 1990, revised 11 August 1991

The genus *Agapornis* in East Africa

The genus *Agapornis* (lovebirds) is confined to the Afrotropical region, with five of the nine species occurring in East Africa, including two species endemic to Tanzania.

The noticeable increase of feral birds in many urban and suburban areas is now posing serious threats to other hole-nesting species, while the trapping and export of many thousands of lovebirds continues on a vast scale in Tanzania, with commercial airlines carrying consignment after consignment of these and other birds for the pet shops in Europe and North America.

Over the past forty years, lovebirds have become extremely popular cage birds and are now a familiar sight in pet shops throughout the world; as a result, this lucrative trade has become, together with habitat destruction, a major threat to the survival of many species.

With such conditions prevailing, it seems appropriate at this time to review the current status of all *Agapornis* species occurring in East Africa.

Fischer's Lovebird *Agapornis fischeri*

Endemic to Tanzania, occurring as a locally common resident in wooded grasslands to the south and east of Lake Victoria, with its range centred around the Serengeti National Park. Other populations occur south to Nzega and Singida and east to Babati and Lake Manyara with wanderers reported near Arusha. It overlaps with *A. personata* in an area immediately south of Lake Manyara to Babati, though no interbreeding has been reported. There is no evidence that it has ever occurred in the wild in Kenya.

Yellow-collared Lovebird *Agapornis personata*

Endemic to Tanzania, occurring as a locally common resident in *Acacia* thorn scrub, being particularly partial to areas with scattered baobab trees. It ranges from Arusha and Tarangire National Park south through Dodoma and central areas to Ruaha National Park and the Lake Rukwa area, overlapping with the preceding species around the southern end of Lake Manyara, and Babati.

Despite a pre-1920 sight record from Taveta on the Kenya–Tanzania border, there is no evidence that it has ever occurred in a purely wild state in Kenya.